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ABOUT THE FEET

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In proportion to his total size, man has a larger and stronger foot than any other mammal save the kangaroo. It is composed of twenty-six bones. The tarsal and metatarsal bones are so arranged as to give an arched form, convex above and concave below. This arch corresponds to the springs of a buggy; without it our bodies would be jarred at every step. No other conceivable arrangement of the bones would so well combine strength and elasticity.

In the normal, unspoiled foot this arch is well defined and noticeably high; the toes are cylindrical, not conical; the second being the longest. The way many persons cramp the toes is shameful. They stand apart, in the unspoiled foot, the great toe by itself, as it were, making a straight line with the inside of the foot instead of bending over to the other toes. The toes should possess individuality, power of self-isolation in movement; we should be able to move and control a toe as we do a finger. The length of a woman's foot should be one-seventh of her height; the measurement around the instep and sole should be the same as the length; and the girth of the ankle the same, or a trifle less. In color, the foot should be rather pink; yellow feet suggest compression, red ones too much standing or over-exercise and pale ones anemia. The nails should be small, pink, and well defined. The position of the foot should be straight forward; a line dropped from the knee-point ought to fall over the second toe.

The women of ancient Greece are supposed to have had the most beautiful feet the world has seen. The sandals they wore afforded the feet perfect freedom and allowed the air and light to beautify the skin. That the deformity and paleness of our pedal extremities are due to our mode of dressing them is conclusively proved when an individual has the courage to snap his finger in convention's face and dress, or rather undress, the feet for health and comfort. Clara Houston, whose feet the National Association of Chiropodists acclaimed perfect, goes barefoot at home and recommends the sandal type of shoe. Many artists' models make a point of going without shoes and stockings a part of every day. George E. Combe, the famous English model, has not worn shoes nor socks for five or six years; his feet are wonderfully perfect. Out of one thousand Porto Ricans recently examined in reference to the feet, not a deformed nor diseased foot was found. Probably not a single flawless foot would be found among an equal number of ordinary shoe-wearers.

On reflection, it seems very strange that with our present enlightenment we continue to ruin our feet by compression. Years ago an old Scotch shoe maker satirized the fashionable boot as suited only to "the foot of a goose with the great toe in the middle;" and the shape of ready-made shoes is little better today, generally speaking. There is no justification for a pointed shoe; the natural foot gradually expands from the instep to the toes, and in the skeleton, itself, the great toe is the longest, though in life the second appears the longest, in perfect feet.

The best way to get a perfectly fitting shoe is for one to stand on a sheet of paper and let the shoe maker mark the exact shape of the foot when the entire weight is on it. Let him make a shoe that covers this outline exactly, with this further consideration: that if from compression the great toe is bent inward, the shape of the shoe must allow for its restoration to the normal position. A line representing the axis of the great toe should pass through the centre of the heel; which shows the danger of a shoe that presses the great toe inward. Of recent years several correct models of shoes have been placed upon the market; the main trouble is that we don't take the time to find them.

Tight, badly-shaped stockings do much harm. A hard, unyielding texture compresses the toes much as does a tight shoe. For ordinary purposes it is well to have the stockings half a size too large. Have no fear about the wrinkles; if one is on the feet much, their normal swelling will smooth them out. Lisle-thread stockings are not so desirable as silk, as the latter allow free evaporation so that the feet remain dry.

The results of abusing the feet are not confined to the extremities, the general health and the temper suffer. Mark Twain cited the one virtue of painful feet when he said that they made one forget all his other troubles. Flat-foot, caused by a sagging of the arch, is a serious, far-reaching complaint. It is a frequent cause of backache, headache and many nervous troubles. Many persons have spent hundreds of dollars to cure rheumatism of the feet only to learn in the end that the trouble was flat-foot. The symptoms are misleading; sometimes the pain is more acute in the knee or hip than in the foot. The latter feels weak, particularly on the inner side, and persists in dragging when the patient walks. Often the head aches after walking on pavements, because of the jar to the spine resultant upon the absence of spring in the foot. In advanced cases there is sometimes painful swelling of the foot.

Though this complaint has been much discussed, one point has received too little attention. I allude to the position of the foot on the ground. A foot that "toes out" is constantly tending to flatten. The inside of the arch that crosses the foot is not strongly supported; so when the leg is allowed to rotate throwing the weight on the inside of the foot, the muscles and ligaments gradually weaken and let the arch-bones down. Prolonged standing and a lowered state of the general health are frequent causes; but the main one is "toeing out."

Logically, the essential measure in treatment is to reform the walk. Set the foot straight forward, as do the Indians. Better err in the direction of "pigeon toes" than to "toe out." In fact, to walk "pigeon toe" for a few moments each day is of benefit. An exercise I suggested that brought good results in a case of incipient flat-foot was to walk a crack, while holding the heels an inch or two from the floor. If the feet are not too sore it is helpful to roll them inward as far as one can and walk a few moments on the outer edge of the feet.

Care of the feet pays. Beautiful hands are not so very uncommon; but a perfect foot among civilized peoples is indeed a *rara avis*. After the daily exercise of the feet, massage them a few moments. Knead and stroke the foot (toward the toes), pull each toe several times and try to develop independent action in each. A novel exercise for this purpose is picking up objects like marbles or pebbles between the toes. Finish the daily treatment with the foot-bath, hot then cold, and if the circulation of the extremities needs toning up, this alternation of the water ought to be repeated several times. When the feet are tender a little salt in the bath will harden them. Sea salt is particularly good for this purpose.

As an antiseptic, use carbolic acid; dissolve a few drops in a tablespoonful of glycerine then pour into the water. Rub the feet occasionally with a little eau de Cologne, it helps to keep the skin smooth and healthy. Use your towel vigorously, taking care to dry the skin between the toes. Dampness here is the most common cause of soft corns.

It is hardly necessary to remind the intelligent reader to have more than one pair of shoes. Frequent change of shoes and stockings is highly healthful to the feet. I think this custom among actresses accounts in some measure for the usual superiority of their feet.